Film as Art

1975

"Film as Art" is an out-of-competition screening of selected works by contemporary film artists, presented as part of the annual American Film Festival. This program offers a sampling of the variety of approaches taken by artists who have chosen film as the medium to express their personal visions.

Once again, the geographic distribution of the filmmakers is a healthy indication that the art of film is thriving throughout North America. Coni Beeson, James Broughton, and Bruce Conner are from California; Paul Brekke is from Seattle; Kathleen Laughlin from Minneapolis; André Leduc from Montreal; the East Coast is represented by Robert Breer from New York and Lillian Schwartz from New Jersey.

The 1975 "Film as Art" program was selected by Amos Vogel. Mr. Vogel, founder-director of Cinema 16 and former director of the New York Film Festival, is currently Director of the Annenberg Cinemathèque at the University of Pennsylvania. His book, *Film as a Subversive Art*, was published last Fall by Random House, Inc.

Over 60 films were screened in the process of selecting this program. Due to time restrictions, a number of films of almost equal quality had to be omitted. An effort was made to include a variety of techniques, and to include some works by new filmmakers as well as those by well-known artists. It was also decided not to include too many filmmakers whose works were shown last year because we want to expose our audience to the work of as many film artists as possible over the years.

After the Festival, the "Film as Art" program will be circulated to libraries and colleges that are members of the Educational Film Library Association.

This program is made possible in part by a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts.

Nadine Covert
Festival Director

Film as Art
at the
17th Annual American Film Festival

Wednesday, June 4, 1975
Carnegie Hall Cinema, New York

Introduction (5 min.)

DISPARATES (Paul Brekke) ..... 11 min.
TOUT ÉCARTILLÉ (André Leduc) ..... 6 min.
5 X MARILYN (Bruce Conner) ..... 14 min.
TESTAMENT (James Broughton) ..... 20 min.

Intermission (5 min.)

SUSAN THROUGH CORN (Kathleen Laughlin) ..... 2 min.
METAMORPHOSIS (Lillian Schwartz) ..... 8 min.
WOMEN (Coni Beeson) ..... 13 min.
STAR GARDEN (Stan Brakhage) ..... 20 min.
FUJI (Robert Breer) ..... 8 min.

Discussion (20 min.)

In selecting this program, I was reassured to discover that the avant-garde movement continues to strive to extend the borders of the possible — it represents nothing less than the incursion of the modern world view, and of modern art, into a medium that is reluctant to enter the 20th century because it is dominated by an industry geared to the entertainment values of a mass audience and, inevitably, to profit. I was encouraged to find that the most meritorious and diverse tendencies continue to co-exist within the avant-garde — from surrealism, expressionism, abstraction, and pop art, to the personal and poetic cinema; and that "formal cinema", while it is a significant component of the avant-garde, is not its *equivalent*. I was reassured once again to find that viewing films without narrative structures can be spectacularly enriching; that the vitality and creativity of certain famed avant-gardists (imperceptibly becoming older statespersons) continues; that requirements of artistic excellence are increasingly met in video and computer films; and that, negatively and positively, all avant-garde tendencies continue to reflect *or undermine* social values (whether the artists know it or not).

All these films represent an invitation. Whether you accept it, whether you open yourself to it, is up to you. The work — the offering, the revelation — is there, waiting.

Amos Vogel

DISPARATES. Paul Brekke. 11 min., color, 1974, $150, rental $18. Dist: Paul Brekke, 211 NE 120th, Seattle WA 98125

DISPARATES is a metaphor about types of change, transformation and metamorphosis; it is structured around the idea of overload and breakdown. Apparently the film is a dream-within-a-dream in which a type of reality, fantasy, and myth are freely created and disposed of by the unconscious. (I use the term *mythic* here in the sense of a reduction of several spaces, times, and experiences into a singleness of flowing visual and audio form.)

I want to heighten perceptions by emphasizing the purely cinematic, to pare down, strip the audio-visual images of all their padding, *to make a direct hit upon the nervous system*, to make celluloid the hairshirt of our numbed perceptions. This does not mean simplification of the images; the images are extremely complex. It is an *attempt* to eliminate thematic, literary or narrative associations long ago discarded by the other visual arts because these associations are not inherent in the art form, nor necessary for its autonomy.

I attempted variations on traditional techniques, such as combining the *straight cut* (in both sound and image) and the *wipe* into what I call the "guillotine cut", the color-sound and visual structure of which renders form and content as one. For me, technique becomes an active force that not only creates a traditional transition, but appears to cause an actual *change* in the film. Instead of indicating a time transition, my use of the *dissolve* means the blending or metamorphosis of images; *multiple exposure* means layering images into a dense mythic-like structure. The more complex images were created on a home-made optical printer through bi-packing and rephotography. —P.B.

Abstract (yet ideologically-based) study of hundreds of often unidentifiable objects from nature, so complex in structure and visual manipulation, so rich in technique and so rapid in tempo that it rather successfully defies verbal description. A work of great originality, the more important for appearing in a field already rich with achievement. —A.V.

TOUT ÉCARTILLÉ. André Leduc. 6 min., color, 1973, $75. rental $10. Dist: National Film Board of Canada, 1251 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

Alternately provocative, impertinent, and malicious, the hero of this film could be compared to those joyous jesters of old whose job was to amuse the kings with their jokes and antics. Enveloped in his long cape, he travels abroad, makes fun of difficulties, laughs, jokes, amuses himself, gets annoyed, attacks, vilifies, and even goes so far as to shake up certain traditional values. All the resources of his instincts and his temperament are used in order to exasperate, to push the spectators to the limit and to lead them to share with him that devil-may-care madness which he incarnates and demonstrates in a strange and irrational way. —translated from an NFBC flyer.

Various animation techniques of live action (pixillation, super-imposition, stop-action) are utilized to portray, at dizzying speed, the surrealist adven-

tures of a black-robed figure moving against realistic backgrounds. The title may be loosely translated as all spread out. *—A. V.*

5 X MARILYN. Bruce Conner. 13½ min., b/w, 1974, $200, rental $20. Dist: Serious Business Co., 1609 Jaynes St., Berkely, CA 94703.

Images of Marilyn Monroe (?) caressing her body, looped over and over and intercut with black leader, while she sings on the soundtrack "*I'm Through With Love.*" A tribute and poignant memorial to Marilyn Monroe's beauty and sensuality.

A song allegedly sung by Marilyn Monroe is repeated five times on the sound track. The picture is made from 1½ minutes of footage excerpted from a movie produced about 1948-50.

Each shot is isolated from the next by black film. The spacing and repetition of images creates new relationships to the music each time the song is repeated. The first establishes the self-gratification character of "Girlie Films". The last makes a summation of the preceding four sequences.

The entire 13½ minutes of film must be seen and heard in sequence. It is a shattered vase reconstructed as accurately as possible, an assemblage of fragments. —B.C.

Magical images of Marilyn (or is it?) transformed into myth, elegy, tragedy, and an almost personal sense of loss. Her technologically repeated (looped) plastic-smile seductions are finally emptied of sex and meaning; only heartbreak and revelation remain. Without the constant repetition ("minimal cinema for a purpose"), we would not grow thoughtful and Conner would not have transformed (revealed) the heroine as a wind-up toy for a nation. —A. V.

The following exchange of correspondence was originally submitted to the editor of Film Quarterly. *The letters are reprinted here with the permission of* Film Quarterly *and the authors.*

Re *Film Quarterly's* review of MARILYN (Spring 1974), the girl impersonating Marilyn Monroe in Bruce Conner's film is Arline Hunter. Miss Hunter imitated MM in a variety of nudie-stag reels of the 1950's, among them the now infamous short, THE APPLE-KNOCKERS AND THE COKE.

In July, 1953, *Eye* magazine called Arline "Marilyn's Double Delight." Eleven months later Miss Hunter turned up in the centerfold of *Playboy* magazine — recreating MM's nude calendar pose. In a subsequent review of the 1954 Playmates, Hunter's picture was captioned "She made like Monroe." Miss Hunter appeared — with screen credit — in feature films too; REVOLT IN THE BIG HOUSE, SEX KITTENS GO TO COLLEGE, MADISON AVENUE.

In addition to Conner's MARILYN (also called MARILYN TIMES FIVE), Hunter's APPLE-KNOCKERS footage has been used in Nick Doob's 42ND STREET MOVIE, and in Bill Osco's HOLLYWOOD BLUE. The Hunter-MM hoax has been previously exposed in *Variety*, *Films In Review*, and *Playboy* magazine, among others, yet Conner himself seems unable to accept the reality of the facts, which he ignores in what comes off as a pathetic attempt to elevate the importance of his tawdry film effort.

—James R. Haspiel

Mr. Haspiel is the author of *Marilyn and the Other Monroe Girls.*

MARILYN TIMES FIVE is an equation. It is not intended to be completed by the film alone. The viewer completes the equation.

M x 5 uses pictures and sound alleged to be the image and voice of Marilyn Monroe. The image, or Anima, of Marilyn was not owned by Norma Jean any more than it was owned by Arline Hunter. Images can sometimes have more power than the person they are supposed to represent. Some cultures consider an image to be a theft of the soul or spirit of a person. They will dwindle and die. The film attempts to reveal some of the powers hidden within itself and far removed from the original source.

I am not sure that I can make a claim for the success or failure of these powers on Mr. Haspiel's mind since he has included his GUARDIANSHIP OF THE TRUE MARILYN'S CINEMATIC VIRTUES in the equation. The illustrious dead quickly gain guardians who also define the image that they have enshrined. Contradiction is heresy and condemned as heresy.

I read James Haspiel's letter as a poem of catch phrase, double entendre, paradox and righteous sincerity which is rarely expressed today except in the most serious context.

—Bruce Conner

TESTAMENT. James Broughton. 20 min., color, 1974, $350, rental $35. Dist: Serious Business Co., 1609 Jaynes St., Berkely CA 94703.

Prompted by an invitation to return to my hometown in California to give a poetry reading and film show, I was inspired to create around that event a reverie of reminiscences on film that would testify to my experience of being human. More self-portrait than autobiography, TESTAMENT celebrates my life as a poet in cinema.

I believe a poet's task is to discover the glory of God and to celebrate it. I believe the glory of God is the divine comedy of everybody and everything. I believe that cinema is the unreeling of the reel reality of practically everything. I also believe in ecstasy for everyone.

Since TESTAMENT is a film about a poet, the major challenge for me was to find fresh and dynamic ways of uniting verse to image, and to shape the diverse material into a terse statement. Structurally, the film balances fast and slow motion against static tableaux, involving still photographs, slides, and film clips, as well as a recreation of early silent movie style in homage to Georges Méliès. Throughout there are direct and indirect references to all the films I have made since 1949. The poems quoted are from my book *A Long Undressing* (New York, The Jargon Society, 1971). —J.B.

A wise, gentle, accepting statement about life and (definitely) death by an American master of poetic cinema whose work now spans several avant-gardes, yet grows ever more mature. Told in free-form, with beautiful, bemused poetry by the filmmaker weaving in and out of childhood images, of images from his former films used as proto-documentary materials, and of live-action shot today. The ending, a magical presentiment of his death, reaches the level of myth. —A.V.

INTERMISSION

SUSAN THROUGH CORN. Kathleen Laughlin. 2 min., color, 1974, $50, rental $7. Dist: Kathleen Laughlin, 1521 10th Ave. So, Minneapolis MN 55404.

SUSAN THROUGH CORN is a short simple film giving an exhilarating sense of a young woman entering a large corn field, being followed with a single-frame camera, emerging on the other side, then disappearing. It begins slow and soft, and becomes sharper, faster, louder — climaxing when the corn tassles dance with the sky-brightness to a triple flute soundtrack. Susan's unresisting face, her red and yellow cotton dress, and the green green shapes interwoven all around her, form — for me — a refreshing momentary portrait of the cornfield and that day in August, as well as of my sister (Susan) herself.

The greater part of the visuals were shot hand-held, single-frame, from various angles as I followed Susan through the cornfield. The opening and closing sequences were filmed from stills — small color prints made from an internegative of selected frames originally shot with the rest of the film. At the time, I had no access to a single-frame projector or an optical printer (both ways to rephotograph with less loss of quality), so these images appear soft due to my several generations rephotography process. For all that, I rather like the softness of the stills before and after the flinging sharpness of the live-action.

The sound track is built around the visuals. I recorded about a half-hour of a friend playing the flute — very randomly, *after* he had watched the film several times. From this recording I chose certain parts, built 3 mag tracks that sometimes overlapped, and had those mixed down to the one I finally used. It's more like choreographing than composing. . . . . —K.L.

A poetic, yet formal study, done in single-frame technique which serves to bisect and abstract the protagonist; a vision of summer, youth, a moment in time. —A.V.

METAMORPHOSIS. Lillian Schwartz. Computer: Ken Knowlton. 8 min., color, 1974, $200, rental $50. Dist: Lillian Productions Inc., 524 Ridge Road, Watchung, NJ 07060.

The film is composed of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines, and expanding and contracting circles — all moving at various speeds. This use of colors and shapes develops area which produces both distinct and indistinct endings, areas connected and unconnected, areas with and without boundaries, as means of plastic organization. . . . .much like Cezanne's articulation of painting but enhanced with the use of movement.

The images were created on a color television controlled by computer. The computer also controlled an animation camera with instructions to open and close the shutter and advance the film. The film was later completed on a typical editing bench and synchronized to Salieri's *Symphony in D Major.*

The object of this film is to further my studies of the interaction of colors. Time and color combined, result in unique visual experiences involving color change and color movement. —L.S.

Computer-generated video-graphics turn into art, as complex orchestrations of abstract color patterns and stunning transmutations of semi-geometric

designs surpass manual animation. A visual and aesthetic delight of great formal beauty and complexity. —A.V.

WOMEN. Coni Beeson. 13 min., color, 1974, $200, rental $25. Dist: Coni Beeson, 99 West Shore Rd, Belvedere CA 94920.

A sardonic exploration of the clichés used to describe women. Visuals, including a variety of nude female bodies, are juxtaposed with a multi-voiced soundtrack that chants a *dictionary* of terms applied to women.

Tired of the view of woman as sex object, I wanted to expose the ridiculousness of label-making. Juxtaposition of sound and visuals, and their relatedness/unrelatedness, creates a *double exposure* which emphasizes the basic theme of WOMEN — that the labels put on females and their sexuality have little to do with the individual and the feminine mystique.

Visual techniques include fast frame, animation, cartoons and classic art, A&B-rolled color on b&w, and b&w on color, frame delays, slow motion, and optical effects. —C.B.

A further achievement by an unorthodox woman filmmaker who has done much (in earlier works such as HOLDING and UNFOLDING) to bring an affirming eroticism into the cinema. Here she creates a valid and striking extension/generalization derived from a specifically female sensibility. —A.V.

STAR GARDEN. Stan Brakhage. 20 min., color, silent, 1974, $280, rental $30. Dist: Film-Maker's Cooperative, 175 Lexington Ave, NYC NY 10016.

A celebration of light; and otherwise it graphs (as Brancusi once put it) ". . .one of those days I wouldn't trade for anything under heaven".

I work with film as a painter works with paint or a poet with words. I'm a receiver (rather than a director or an editor) and this film is a gift. . .as surely as the light and life that make it possible.

The "STAR", as it is singular, is the sun; and it is metaphored, at the beginning of this film, by the projector anyone uses to show forth. Then the "imaginary" sun begins its course throughout whatever darkened room this film is seen within. At 'high noon' (of the narrative) it can be imagined as if in back of the screen, and then to shift its imagined lightsource gradually back thru aftertones and imaginings of the 'stars' of the film it achieves a one-to-one relationship with moon again. This 'sun' of the mind's eye of every viewer does not necessarily correspond with the off-screen 'pictured sun' of the film; but anyone who plays this game of illumination will surely see the film in its most completely conscious light. —S.B.

A celebration of the atmosphere and texture of a day of peace and human serenity in the filmmaker's warm, lived-in house — centering on faces and movements of his children and on the rooms and objects of a poet's existence, transformed by shafts and tones of light. Stylistically, poetic fragmentation and abstraction remain (complex montage, choreographed camera movements, changing camera set-ups and speeds), but there is also a continued

return by a master formalist to the human element — an evolution already evident in some of his other recent films, particularly his autopsy film TO SEE WITH ONE'S OWN EYES. —A.V.

FUJI. Robert Breer. 8 min., color, 1974, Sale: apply, rental $15. Dist: Film-Maker's Cooperative, 175 Lexington Avenue, NYC NY 10016.

1000 views of Mount Fuji from the window of the Tokaido Express, using rotoscope and abstract animation.

I wanted to develop the motion perspective of the train window view. Mt. Fuji in the background was able to serve both as itself and as an abstract shape, just as it seems to do in real life.

FUJI was made partly by tracing, frame by frame, the live images taken from a train window on the Tokaido Express during a trip from Osaka to Tokyo. The drawings were then photographed in succession, just as in normal animation photography. For this process, known as rotoscoping, I used a stop-motion projector placed under a glass-top drawing table. —R.B.

A poetic, lyrical, rhythmic, riveting achievement. A magical color dream of a voyage. One of the most important works by a master, who — like Conner, Brakhage, and Broughton — spans several avant-gardes in his ever more perfect explorations. —A.V.

DISCUSSION

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